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SUBJECT: LONGTIME NIGERIA OBSERVER ON KANO'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Summary

1. (SBU) Embassy officers met Sept. 1 with Professor Paul Lubeck, who recently visited Kano State. Lubeck formerly lived in Kano and has visited Nigeria for more than 40 years. Lubeck's observations about Kano were:

- anti-Americanism there is at its highest point in more than 40 years;
- the United States has hurt itself badly among northerners with the perception that it is not opposed to President Obasanjo's apparent quest for a third term;
- because most northerners perceive federal politics and their own influence as meaningless, they feel "isolated, rejected, and marginalized";
- there likely will be trouble in the north if Obasanjo seeks another term; and
- Shari'a has improved law and order and is economically redistributive to the poor, but Kano lacks the leadership to restore it to economic prosperity. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Ambassador Campbell and embassy officers met on September 1, 2005, in Abuja with Professor Paul Lubeck at the conclusion of Lubeck's research project in Kano. Lubeck is a professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Cruz; he formerly lived in Kano, and has been visiting Nigeria for more than 40 years. In his current research, Lubeck focuses on the relationship between globalization and the Islamic revival in urban-industrial contexts. Lubeck offered the following observations on his visit to Kano.

Northern Nigerians' Views of the United States

3. (SBU) Anti-Americanism in Kano is higher than at any time in Lubeck's more than 40 years of visits to Nigeria. Much of this unpopularity results from the U.S. policy on Iraq and the United States' perceived support for President Obasanjo in the 2003 election and since. Northerners see the United States as being "enormously influential" over Obasanjo, and are unhappy with the United States over the perception that it is not opposed to Obasanjo's pursuing a third term as president.

4. (U) Kano is the focal point in Nigeria for citizens who feel neglected and who oppose the Obasanjo government. Additionally, most northerners perceive federal politics and their own influence as virtually meaningless. There is a "widespread sense of despair" in Kano but also the acknowledgement that Northern Nigeria offers no alternative leadership. According to Lubeck, Kano's inhabitants did not consider the Nigerian military a factor in their political assessment. While there is nostalgia for the period of military rule and its resulting stability, the Nigerian military today is "irrelevant" in the north. Said Lubeck, "The Army runs itself, and even [federal] ministers know that they don't matter." Instead, this is a "one-person government" in the form of Obasanjo, and there are "selections, not elections." Lubeck predicted there likely "will be trouble" in the north if Obasanjo pursues a third, currently unconstitutional, term - even if Obasanjo manages to make such an act "constitutional" by changing the current document's two-term presidential limit or by reinterpreting the Constitution.

5. (SBU) Conspiracy theories are common in the north, ranging from the United States' perceived unconditional backing of Obasanjo, to why the Nigerian Government apparently has no policy for reviving industry in Nigeria, and especially in Kano. Educated northerners are very aware of the U.S. military's heightened interest in the Gulf of Guinea and Nigerian oil, which concerns them greatly and contributes to a general suspicion of U.S. intentions.

Lubeck recommended the United States should consider no longer sending U.S. Special Forces to Sokoto for training and be selective in other parts of the north. "Sokoto is viewed as a religious city (similar to Mecca)," and the presence of foreign military forces can be inflammatory, he said. This attitude can fuel strong anti-American sentiment there and contributes to the arguments of conspiracy theorists, however implausible.

16. (U) The closure of the U.S. Consulate and U.S. Information Service office in Kaduna was very harmful to U.S. interests in northern Nigeria, according to Lubeck. He commented that U.S. officers posted there had been "enormously influential" in the region, and they provided an open and welcome face of America that northerners could easily identify. This lack of a full-time American presence continues to contribute to northern feelings of isolation and rejection. Northerners point to the cost and inconvenience of traveling to the U.S. Consulate in Lagos for U.S. visas, as well as the "growing" refusal rate and the added security requirements. (Note: Embassy Abuja's consular staffing level is expected to increase sufficiently in the indeterminate future to permit the embassy to issue nearly all types of U.S. visas. End note.)

----- Motivations for the Adoption of Shari'a -----

17. (U) The north's adoption of Shari'a is an idealistic response to try and heal sectarian conflicts within Nigerian Islam, and to reestablish law and order. Northerners feel they tried Western democracy and military rule, both of which failed, and that at least they know Shari'a. Shari'a is the "republic of virtue" and the "stoic acceptance of poverty, but with dignity and social order." Shari'a is in fact conservative, not radical. Even if Shari'a does not "succeed," it is about morality and not about delivering a short-term economic benefit. It is not a rational-actor model; instead, it is a restorationist, Muslim model which follows chronologically the British conquest of Nigeria.

18. (U) Shari'a is a political system and a class system. It also is economically redistributive in nature and because of this is highly popular with the poor of Kano. No one in Kano is opposed to Shari'a, but no one knows exactly what it is, either. Lubeck described it as a Rorschach test, within which each adherent sees the characteristics and benefits of Shari'a in his or her own way.

19. (U) Despite Kano State's adoption of Shari'a, there is no support for the Nigerian Taliban in Kano in any institutional way, and the common people consider members of that organization to be "criminals." Probably because of their commercial interests and prosperity, Kano's Lebanese are "modernizers," and excepting the United States' position on Iraq, they are pro-American. Kano's Lebanese also fear the rise of more fundamentalist elements. Religion - of all types - is now the "growth industry" of Nigeria, Lubeck said.

110. (U) Shari'a is producing some degree of law and order following the Judiciary's collapse after Nigeria's civil war and its oil boom. Crime is vastly lower in Kano than in Nigeria's south; according to Lubeck, Kano is safe even throughout the night. Kano's hizbah, or Islamic police, are not concentrating on regulating social behavior but instead are mainly occupied with directing traffic, in an employment initiative of the governor of Kano State.

----- Economic and Social Conditions in Kano -----

11. (U) Kano's Muslim brotherhoods are very strong in the commercial sector. These associations provide trust and rituals, which make possible loans and credit - in a society in which there is no possibility of legal recourse. The problem is Nigerians' lack of access to credit, in a country where commercial interest rates range from 20 to 30 percent. These Muslim brotherhoods therefore aid long-distance credit as well as trade, and act as a form of privatization in providing services no longer supplied by a failing state.

112. (U) Lubeck says the north should be concentrating on producing food but instead is trying to control national oil rents. Some Lebanese have left Kano because of the prevailing poor economic conditions there. Commerce in Kano has been harmed severely by the fact that people are too poor to buy most kinds of products. As a result, northern Nigeria is now using only 20 percent of its industrial capacity, as compared to 1985. New construction is evident in Kano, but there is no other evidence of wealth or of benefits from Nigeria's very substantial oil revenues. Because of the complete breakdown of the government's ability to provide services, electricity in Kano has now

been privatized - but very inefficiently - in the form of power produced by generators. According to Lubeck, if things worked as they should, Kano would act as the Chicago of this part of West Africa, rather than being economically devastated. With new and visionary leadership, Kano has the potential to regain its place as the import-export waypoint of the pan-Sahel region - but this leadership is lacking, and there are no potential leaders waiting on the sidelines.

113. (U) Fertility in Kano is very high, in part because the term "family planning" fails on its face. Instead, it must be renamed "reproductive health" if it is to succeed. Improved health care has led to a "soaring" population - despite a likely concurrent increase in the infant mortality rate. As a result, Kano City's population could now be as high as 4 million. Lubeck noted that people in Kano are embarrassed by the outbreak of polio in Nigeria's north. There is also, however, popular resentment over the very public efforts of the World Health Organization and the U.S. Agency for International Development to devote resources to eradicate polio, rather than combat the more widespread problems of malnutrition and malaria.

Comment

114. (SBU) Embassy Abuja generally agrees with Professor Lubeck's observations about Kano and Nigeria's north. Northerners clearly feel estranged from Nigeria's political process, and they perceive U.S. policy as being almost completely in line with the Christian-dominated Obasanjo government. Unlike the South-South's objections to the Obasanjo government, which focus much more on questions of oil-revenue distribution, the north's alienation is cultural and deep-rooted. As the leader of the north, Kano will be the likely location of any violent Nigerian expression of dissatisfaction with the Obasanjo administration or his increasingly credited pursuit of a third presidential term.

CAMPBELL